

## Victoria Uriostegui

### 2023 Advocacy Fellows Reflection

**What are current strengths/What's missing from the current policy making landscape? How do you plan to continue to move your own growth as an advocate forward after this experience?**

Though I observed many bills, I was able to see the lawmaking landscape better by following [HB 8](#) (transforming community college finance) and [SB 17](#) (bans DEI offices on public college campuses) more closely. Engaging with the Texas legislature for the first time I was struck by how inaccessible it was for those not in Austin to have their voice heard. Despite being in Austin, without the support of legislative staffers, organizers, coalition partners, and Will Davies (my super advisor and Breakthrough's data and policy analyst) it would've been difficult to understand all the different technicalities and processes. Even through all the hurdles, I questioned if my voice was actually acknowledged sometimes. I also observed how student and youth voices are not represented and spaces for us are not made. In higher-education bills, invited testimony never included students. Our stake is huge but we are left out of the conversation. Committees will examine student issues from all sides except from students' perspectives.

There are huge power imbalances at play but we must continue to show up and be loud together. [Texas Student 4 DEI](#), a grassroots movement of Texas higher education students I joined, came together in light of missing student voices and has since fought tenaciously against threatening anti-DEI bills. It was an honor to see first-hand fierce student advocates organize and raise awareness in and out the capitol. When student voice is welcomed and taken into account policy is better informed and thus able to meet student needs properly. This was the case in the forming of HB 8 where student voice through the [Student Advisory Council](#) was present from the brainstorming stage. A diverse group of Community college student leaders from across the state were able to take part in the recommendations meeting and have followed through in every step of the legislative process to see this bill become law.

In just one year I have learned abundantly from all the experiences and people I've met along the way. Every space I was in was new to me and I was often taken out of my comfort zone. However, I will always be grateful for the opportunity to learn alongside Will who's been a gracious and beyond supportive mentor. The two cohorts of student advocates I supported inspired and taught me more than they know. With all I've received, I desire to explore and dive deeper into issues at the local level via my campus and at the federal level! I take with me the skills to make my own seat at the table and the responsibility to include and help others do the same.